



# More University Students are Volunteers

By MARTHA PALUCH

The number of American university students who volunteer for community service projects in the United States has risen nearly 20 percent since 2002, according to a new study.

University students "represent a large and growing source of the nation's volunteers," according to the Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent federal agency that provides grants and other support to volunteer organizations throughout the United States. The agency's latest study found that three in 10 university students, or 3.3 million people, volunteered in 2005—a gain of 600,000 students above the 2.7 million reported in 2002.

On campuses and in the community, university students are participating in a range of volunteer service activities such as tutoring and mentoring children, raising funds for worthy causes and helping their fellow citizens recover from natural disasters, including hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

## Community-based research and service learning

Universities in the United States were founded with the principle of civic engagement in mind in addition to their academic missions. To continue this civic service tradition, universities have embraced new ways of engaging students, such as through community-based research and service learning.

Community-based research involves students in projects that address social issues. Service learning integrates community service projects with classroom learning, and students often receive academic credit for their projects.

In October 2006, for the first time, six colleges and universities received the President's

Higher Education Community Service Award for encouraging and supporting noteworthy student community service projects. Three awards were for excellence in general community service and three were for Gulf Coast hurricane relief efforts.

## Tutoring and mentoring

One honoree was California State University, Monterey Bay, which has a service-learning requirement for all undergraduates. Some students serve as tutors and mentors in underperforming local schools, while others assist homeless and other marginalized people by preparing meals at the local soup kitchen, teaching at a computer lab in the neighborhood, working on neighborhood beautification and other projects.

"I enjoy mentoring because it makes me feel like I'm part of the community. The kids are all really eager to participate," says Allison Stoddart,

19, an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

"I enjoy this opportunity to be a role model for these girls during a tumultuous period in their lives," says Kristen Ward, 20, a student at Middlebury College in Vermont, talking about her experience mentoring middle school girls through a program called Sister-to-Sister, sponsored by the American Association of University Women.

Tutoring and mentoring are the most popular volunteer activities on university campuses, followed by fundraising and preparing, distributing and serving food. In 2005, nearly 32 percent of university student volunteers worked at educational or youth services organizations, and 24 percent worked at religious organizations. Other students volunteered with sports and cultural groups and organizations specializing in international issues, public safety, environment and health care.



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Left: Kevin Day, an engineering student at Case Western Reserve University, Ohio, and his brother, Brian, fix toys for disabled kids.

## Raising funds and baking cookies

More universities are creating programs to help match students to volunteer opportunities and to link community work with academic programs. Some service-learning programs are entirely student-run.

One example of a student-run program is National Student Partnerships. Its Web site is <http://www.nspnet.org/>. Started by two undergraduate students at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1998, the program operates a national network of drop-in resource centers, staffed by student volunteers from area universities.

Volunteers provide on-site and referral services to low-income people. National Student Partnerships has mobilized more than 2,500 trained student volunteers in 12 cities.

Religious groups engage in community service on university campuses. At Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, for example, members of the Muslim Students Association tutor refugee children at a local primary school and raise funds for earthquake and famine relief. The Emory Christian Fellowship is working to help revitalize a park in downtown Atlanta and members bake cookies for the patients at the Children's Hospital of Atlanta.

Another growing trend among college students is the "alternative spring break" movement, in which university students perform community service projects during their vacation week in March. Thousands of students each year build houses for low-income families, care for HIV/AIDS patients and tutor inner-city children instead of going to beach parties in Florida.

Nine students from Vermont's Middlebury College Hillel, the Jewish student organization on campus, traveled to Mississippi to provide Hurricane Katrina relief work in March 2006. More than 100 students from 10 universities worked together to repair 17 roofs in a heavily damaged neighborhood. Trip leader Rebecca Steinberg says, "It was an amazing experience that I know we will never forget."

Each year, the Corporation for National and Community Service ([www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org)) provides opportunities for more than two million Americans of all ages to serve their communities through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America.

The corporation estimates five million students will be engaged in volunteerism by 2010.

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Students from Trinity International University, Chicago, clean up a park in New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina.